

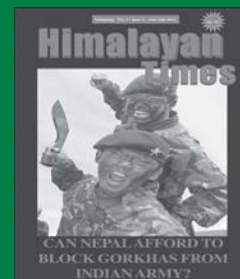
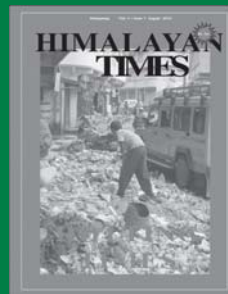
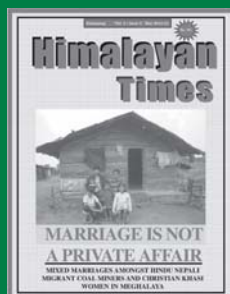
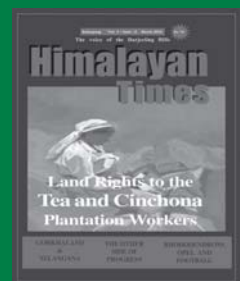
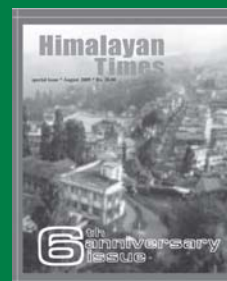
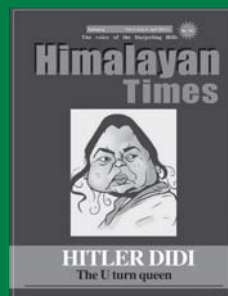
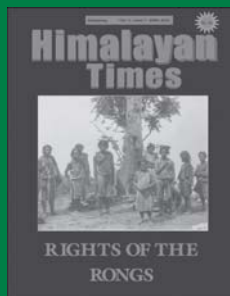
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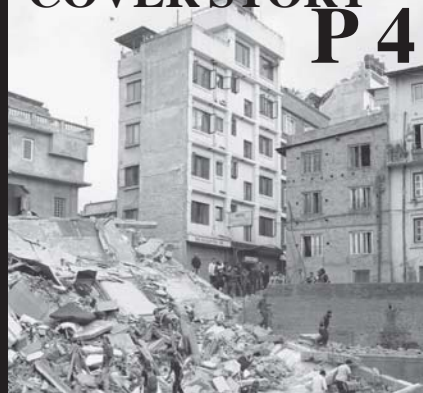
EARTHQUAKES....
Is Kalimpong prepared ????

HIMALAYAN TIMES

where we dare to
speak..



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EARTHQUAKES ...

Is Kalimpong prepared ????

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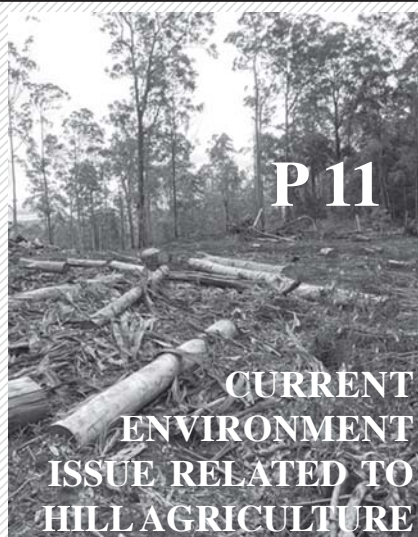
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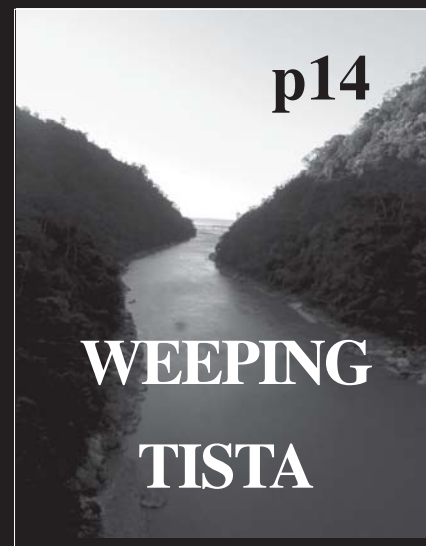
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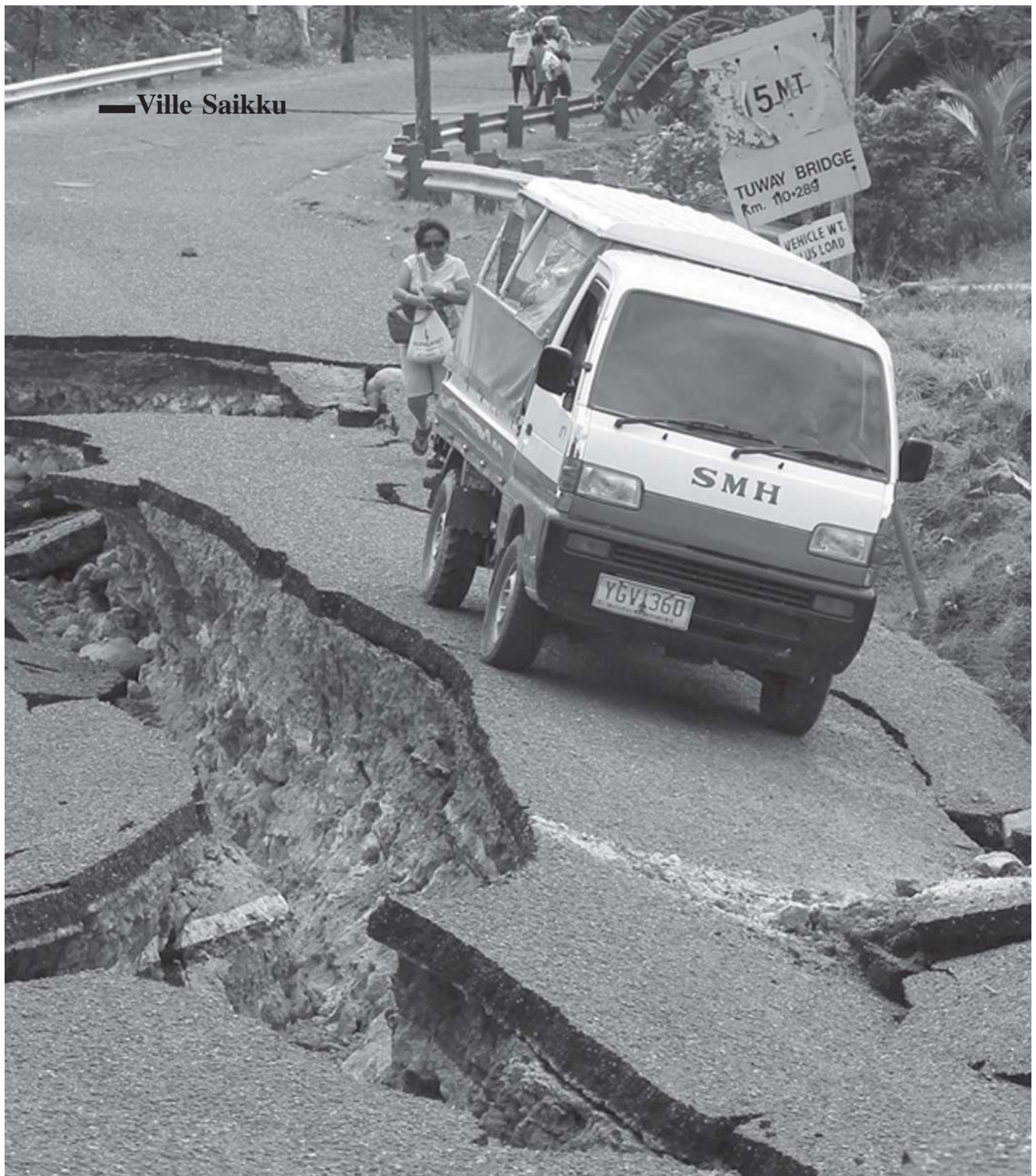
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— Ville Saikku

EARTHQUAKES ... Is Kalimpong prepared ????

Himalayan Times
Vol 4 **Issue 10



Sandip C. Jain

Kalimpong sits comfortably on the Himalayan Belt, one of the most earthquake prone areas in the world. As there hasn't been a major earthquake exceeding $M8$ in the last fifty years, the town has grown and expanded, seemingly oblivious to the dangers lurking underneath the surface. How many buildings have been built without proper procedures against earthquakes, how many people furnish their houses according to taste rather than safety, and how have you planned for the worst possible scenario? Now the latest monster tremor measuring $M7.9$ with its epicenter 70 km north of Pokhara in Nepal which has virtually flattened much of Nepal and which has taken close to 10000 lives, has compelled us to open our eyes to this all consuming force of Mother Nature.

History

There has been many references made to earthquakes, ever since the time of enlightenment of Buddha c. 558 BC, but like many earthquakes since then, they have been short and undisruptive passages in semireligious texts. These earthquakes lack indefinable data, so they cannot be fully confirmed. It was only at the beginning of the last century that the quakes that shook the land have been studied and categorized. Four great earthquakes of magnitudes exceeding $M8$ have been witnessed in 1897, 1905, 1934 and in 1950 that caused great destruction. For example the great Bihar earthquake of 1934 on the Richter scale measured a staggering $M 8.4$ and caused the death of approximately 11 000 people in the area. Another ten earthquakes exceeding $M 7.5$ have occurred in the Himalayan Belt in the past 100 years. In 1988 Darjeeling and Gangtok were badly damaged when an $M 6.7$ earthquake hit and 23 years earlier an $M 5.9$ shattered the same cities. Even though Kalimpong has been saved in the past years from major destruction, research shows that activity is not only concentrated on these areas, but vary with every earthquake with high and low patches of activity.

The world's greatest topographic features, the Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau were born as a result of continent – continent collision of the Indian and the Eurasia plates. This continuing northward collision of the Indian plate with respect to the Eurasian landmass causes the intense seismicity that is found in the area and most of the tension in the Himalayan region is concentrated along the shallow north dipping planes. This indicates, according to specialists in the field, the underthrusting of the Indian plate beneath the Eurasian plate. This movement caused by the collision between the two continent plates is known as Himalayan Frontal Thrust (HFT). Even with the reasons of earthquakes in the area known to specialists and with records of previous earthquakes to study, the prediction of earthquakes is a very unpredictable business. Due to lack of extensive research in the area, there is an enormous strain on estimating more precisely the reoccurrence intervals for a great earthquake and even the best minds in the business cannot produce anything concrete. The best estimates by various experts for great earthquakes on the basis of slip rate and palaeoseismology suggest reoccurrence interval ranging from 180 to 500 years. With such broad estimates, the people living in earthquake prone areas should become more aware and prepared.

Earthquakes

An earthquake is a phenomenon that results from and is powered by the sudden release of energy. The energy released produces four different seismic waves simultaneously and can be felt on the ground. The waves responsible for the shaking are P-waves (primary waves) and S-waves (secondary waves or shear waves). The other two types of surface waves are called Love-waves and Raleigh-waves. There are two classes of earthquake effects, described as direct and secondary effects. The direct effect is when the earth around the area where the earthquake happens is deformed, mostly through gaping cracks in the surface or sudden ground height alterations. But as many earthquakes never break the surface, the amount of damage inflicted by direct effects is usually a disturbance to the eye, when viewing the damage rather than the in human life or the wallet. A well-built house near the area of origin of the earthquake, called the seismogenic fault, can often escape major damage. Most of the damage inflicted by an earthquake is due to the secondary effects, which are not directly

caused by fault movement, but which result from the spread of the seismic waves moving away from the seismogenic fault. These secondary effects are caused by the seismic waves moving through an area. When the seismic waves, mainly P-waves and S-waves, spread away from the seismogenic fault, they travel like ripples in a pond. The further you are from the centre of the earthquake, the weaker the waves become. The secondary effects can cause seismic-shaking, landslides, liquefaction and can trigger aftershocks and new earthquakes. Seismic-shaking is the violent side-to-side shaking, which has the capability and power to topple and destroy houses. In the water-saturated and soft soil areas the shaking causes the sand grains to loose contact and friction with other grains. This phenomenon is called liquefaction and such ground has no strength and cannot bear any load. Landslides are commonly started when the soil layer on the side of a hill or a mountain liquefies during seismic shaking and flows down as a wall of mud. The power and destruction caused by these phenomenons depends on the strength of the tremor, the location and the depth in which it occurred. Other factors that effect include; the distance away from the centre of the earthquake, the path the waves take, the types of soil the waves encounter and also the quality of the constructions it passes through. The time of day as well as the preparedness of the people can have a tremendous impact on the amount of destruction. If one should hit during the busiest time of day, while everyone is busy at work or out on the streets, the loss of human life is said to multiple.

The possible destruction of secondary waves

The powerful side-to-side shaking on construction caused by the seismic-shaking has a tendency to bend the right angles found in houses to other angles. This process is called shear, which sturdily built houses can withstand depending on the power and length of the violent shaking. Scientists found that triangular shapes are best suitable for withstanding the most shears, but unfortunately the Egyptian-style architecture has not become fashionable here in Kalimpong. Reinforced concrete that only has vertical steel rods, designed to withstand the weight of the structure when the weight is distributed evenly and straight down, does not hold up to powerful tremors of a long-lasting earthquake. Around the world in earthquake prone areas construction codes have been implemented to include much more steel that is wound around the vertical steel rods horizontally to keep the column from breaking apart during the violent side-to-side shaking. As more steel is required to build these stronger fortified concrete columns, it is much more expensive than columns with only vertical steel rods. Another popular construction norm was to make a strengthened foundation for the construction and weaker steel rods on the upper levels, to keep the weight and the strain applied to the base at a minimum. This common practise proved to be fatal in strong tremors, as the upper levels did not withstand the pressure applied to them during an earthquake and crushed everything and everyone on the lower levels. The location of houses is as important as building a sturdy well thought-out house. In all earthquakes, the low-lying areas with soft, water-saturated soils experience by far the most damage. Building a house founded on water-saturated and soft soils will liquefy during a tremor causing houses to lean or topple totally.

Kalimpong

The Government of West Bengal has issued building codes that are monitored and implemented by the Municipal Office of Kalimpong. The rules state that the height of the buildings should not exceed 11.5 m or four stories high, whichever is lower. There are guidelines against building near the vicinity of jhoras. When planning to build a house here, one must follow protocol and present detailed plans to the Municipal Office, where the location and height of the future buildings must be described in detail. Once permission has been granted, the building process is monitored by the officials of the Municipal Office at regular intervals. So accordingly, there should be no buildings built near jhoras, or exceeding 11.5 m. But there are houses being built at this very moment, that exceeds the 11.5 m height limit, on locations with heavy streams running through them weakening the foundations with every passing litre of water. These structures will fall like a house of cards, when or if a major earthquake strikes. One does not need extensive knowledge in building or a measuring device to notice that these sort of houses are being built. Why are the rules being broken so shamelessly? One possible answer to this question could be that there is corruption among the links of command, which by any standards is nothing new or surprising. But there is another possible answer to this terrible question and that is that there is no-one who cares enough about the potential of building deathtraps, as the problem is out of sight, so then surely it is out of mind. Darjeeling and Gangtok have suffered in the past from destruction due to earthquakes, they know what it is like to see the awesome power of Mother Nature at work, but Kalimpong so far has been spared the true horror of widespread destruction. Earthquake prevention, which should start from conscious citizens, to choosing the safest locations for housing and using the safest materials and abiding by the rules, is not by any means cheap. Everything costs money, lots and lots of

money. So it is easier to turn the other cheek and pretend the problem is not there. When or if it happens, the powers at be can turn to the emergency plan and sort out the mess, accordingly and with the utmost professionalism. Except that Kalimpong does not have an emergency plan in the case of an earthquake. Kalimpong is luckier than most towns, as there is the army barracks up on the hill and in case of an emergency like an earthquake, the army will spare no expense or effort to come to the aid of the people of Kalimpong. The army has been reliable and willing to help in the past, but what happens when the hill the barracks is situated on becomes one liquefied mass of mud, water, trees and equipment thundering down the mountain? They will be in as much need of assistance as everyone else. So to which organisation should the residents turn for help? The Red Cross? The United Nations? Last year in October in the Kashmir region, the earthquake left in its wake a path of total destruction leaving nothing behind for the survivors to live on. The roads were washed away or blocked by landslides to prevent help from reaching the most badly effected areas until many days later. Even now, nearly a year later, the route is still difficult and the people are forced to live in tents even during the bitterly cold winter months and rebuilding has been painstakingly slow. Could that be the future of Kalimpong one day? Huddled in an old army tent in midwinter?

The future in our hands

What Kalimpong needs to do, is to address the lacking state of preparedness. This town has been lucky in the past, but one day that luck might run out, so the people should at least be prepared and have some idea what to do, where to go. Even if prevention is expensive and a long process to organise everything, it must be started. Houses should be built firmer and according to the regulations, or at least away from running water. But everything must start from the conscious citizen, to push for an emergency plan, to prepare oneself and one's family by learning some basic recommendations on what to do when an earthquake does strike. That will perhaps spare a few more lives.

A few tips

If you are inside your house, when an earthquake happens - STAY THERE. Take cover under some heavy furniture, or brace yourself in a doorway. Exit carefully when shaking stops, as many things in your house have become loose and might cause harm.

If you are outside, when an earthquake happens – STAY THERE. Move to an open area away from buildings and power-lines.

DO NOT EXIT OR ENTER a building during an earthquake. There is a danger of falling debris and flying glass.

If you are in your car – STOP and REMAIN in the car. If possible avoid stopping near tall buildings. The car will protect you from flying debris. 🚗

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THE LOST TEA GARDEN OF PEDONG

BY DAN ROBERTSON

This story appears in full in the March / April edition of TEA magazine



Many believe that it was the British who first brought tea to India.

In fact, India had been consuming tea produced in China since the 7th century — more than a thousand years before the British established their first gardens in Assam.

Long before loose tea as we know it was created, compressed cakes and bricks of tea from Southern Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces in China traveled by caravan to Tibet and then onward to far-off lands. In the monasteries and nomad tents in Tibet, one can still find this kind of tea in use.

Tea was an expensive luxury for some, and an essential staple for others. The cost to bring it all the way from China, both in currency and in effort, was often beyond the point of profit. Losses in cargo, human and animal resources and onerous taxes and tolls among other things, had to be recouped in the selling price. For the tea merchant, these challenges posed formidable obstacles in running a successful business.

Their journey ended in Kalimpong. Little known to people outside of North Eastern India, let alone the rest of the world, the town has served for hundreds of years as a junction point and conduit for trade between China, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma and India. It was the nearly impossible destination of the brave caravans that brought tea and other goods from remote Southern China along the ancient Tea Horse Road. The arduous journey took months to complete and passed through hundreds of miles of inhospitable and often precarious terrain. Many a pack-mule and handler met their ultimate fate on the trek.

The bulk of the tea consignments from China were intended for Tibet's capital city of Lhasa. Even so, it was a longer distance from Yunnan's tea producing districts of Xi Shuang Ban Na (shee shwang ban nah) and Dali (dah lee) than from Lhasa to the Indian border. Eventually, some enterprising Chinese realized that if the tea was made in Kalimpong and shipped to Lhasa, months of time and cost could be saved. And so it was that tea planting and production began in India, hundreds of years before the British East India Company began planting.

The Chinese set up tea production in the lower reaches of the Himalayas, taking advantage of the ideal weather and environment for growing tea. Actually part of Bhutan at that time, gardens were set up in Algarah, Pedong and Lava along the Jalep La – the road to Lhasa. Most of the details of when and how these teas were produced were carried away by the misty clouds that haunt the hills. There remain only a few “old timers” who carry the oral tradition and heritage of the area.

In the early 1800’s, during a time of openness in India, Tibet and China, foreign influence, though by no means rampant, became more tolerated. As a bustling land port, Kalimpong experienced a thin stream of outsiders, arriving for trade, adventure or to evangelize their faith. Roads were improved. Infrastructure was enhanced. A Scottish Presbyterian Church was built, which still stands. Originally coming as missionaries to promote Christianity, a group of Swiss Priests who also recognized the value of tea, established a tea garden named Damsang in Pedong, on the outskirts of Kalimpong.



Migrating from their original base in Hele, Nepal, these “Swiss Fathers” as they are still known, propagated their faith, converting many of the local people to Christianity. They also added to the number of faithful by eventually marrying local women and remained in the area for the rest of their lives.

In the years that followed the Swiss (and the British) expanded and mechanized the tea growing centers. Estates were set up, producing “tea that was formed in compressed ball shapes,” recalls a local elder named Chottu Fulla. This compact form was more efficient for transporting the cargo to Lhasa. The Damsang tea estate was eventually reorganized into the Doars Tea Company which owned the Kumai tea estate, also on the trade route. In fact, was once a road stretching 677 miles through Kumai estate and connecting the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh with Lhasa, Tibet.

Sporadic clashes along the border following the political upheaval in Tibet culminated in the 1962 Indian/Chinese war that left 3,500 dead and 2,500 wounded. The passes into Tibet were closed. Domestic civil unrest in the 1980’s further jeopardized commerce and the tea garden was gradually abandoned, its bushes left unattended or cut down.

Records of the early years and figures on tea processing and the volume of tea produced went up in flames during the conflict. One still sees the ruins of old buildings, decimated by time and civil war. The grave of Leslie Ranger remains on the site with a telltale inscription in stone revealing the family’s connection with tea. It identifies Ranger as the Superintendent of the “Doars Tea Company.” His resting place is just a few steps from where the old Damsang tea factory used to stand.

The exact whereabouts of the once prolific estate are known only to a few locals who tell stories about the “days of tea in Pedong.” In December we traveled to the site where we met the last descendant of the Swiss missionaries. He lives on the grounds of the former tea garden.

James (Jimmy) Ranger is weathered by years. He and his wife walk the narrow paths once lined with flushing tea bushes.

According to Ranger, tea has not been made here for nearly ten years. Before then only a small amount of leaves were plucked, primarily personal use by the local people. Every so often, some tea would be sold from hand to hand. Some of the tea bushes still exist as of this writing. A few were recently pruned. Others are rooted precariously in the path of a new stone road and will surely be pulled out.

I was accompanied on my trip by tea businessman and historian Rajiv Lochan. Together we ventured into this nearly forgotten place to discover if there was any truth to the legends that tea was once grown in the hills.

We set off on our quest from Darjeeling, under the watchful gaze of Mt. Kanchenjunga. The four hour odyssey took us through rolling hills covered in green tea bushes, across the majestic Coronation bridge and along the powerful Teesta river.

We wound around precarious hair-pin turns, through bustling Kalimpong town, plied our way up through alpine forests and stopped at the aptly named the Silk Route Inn to refresh and meet up with a man named Pedan.

The exact whereabouts of the once prolific estate are known only to a few locals who tell stories about the “days of tea in Pedong.”

Tea has not made here for ten years. Before then only a small amount of leaves were plucked, primarily personal use by the local people. Every so often, some tea would be sold from hand to hand. Some of the tea bushes still exist as of this writing. A few were recently pruned. Others are rooted precariously in the path of a new stone road and will surely be pulled out.

It was Pedan who took us to meet “Jimmy Uncle” as he is known. We set out on foot up a wide path. The gravel paving gave way to dirt and narrowed to almost shoulder’s width. Pausing at a clearing to catch our breath we turned around to see the mountain range behind us. “Over that ridge is China” our guide informed us. Only those with special permits dare approach the border which is still manned by soldiers. Indeed, the Mountain Division of the Indian Army has a base nearby. In the clearing also stood the ruins of the old family house.

We continued up the trail spurred on by a sixth sense that there were tea bushes nearby. Our hopes were rewarded when a six foot “wild” growing tea bush was spotted about 10 feet off the path. A few more steps and the answer to our quest was fully revealed. Abandoned tea bushes dotted the hillock that led to the cottage where James Ranger and his wife live.

Sitting on the front porch, which was decorated for Christmas, Ranger shared the story of his family history. He proudly pointed out the portraits of his grandfather Fr. Leslie Ranger and other fore bearers. After spending nearly an hour answering our numerous questions, he strolled with us back down the path, tenderly touching some of the leaves of the tea plants that remained.

The sun was low in the afternoon sky as we said our goodbyes. During the four hour night-drive from the hills down to Siliguri, we were tired but excited. The thrill of the day’s adventure echoed through our minds. Pleased with our discovery, we felt grateful for our good fortune and honored to have touched a piece of tea history that was nearly forgotten.

In 2006 the Nathu la (pass) was formally reopened, once again allowing trade and traffic to flow between India and Tibet. Kalimpong has since become a tourist destination, known for beautiful scenery, abundant plant life (especially orchids and rhododendrons) and religious studies.

It is hoped that the old Jelep la pass will also reopened which will further revive the local economy. Will there be a resurrection of the old tea gardens of Pedong?

Who can say, but telling the story will keep the tea alive for those who enjoy the adventure that swirls in their tea cup. 🍵

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT ISSUE RELATED TO HILL AGRICULTURE

DR. DHIMAN MUKHERJEE



Environmental problems are divided into those caused by natural and those by human causes. Natural erosion is caused by widespread rainfall throughout the mountain terrain due to monsoonal winds. Man-made erosion is caused by cultivation, grazing of livestock, collection of fuel wood and timber, and construction of houses, roads, dams and reservoirs, water pollution etc. Management strategies for the region should aim to optimize human welfare by maintaining the balance of the ecosystem and minimizing environmental hazards. It is noted that the major constraints to regional development in the North Eastern Himalaya are backward technology and lack of an adequate infrastructure, markets, and trained personnel.

Areas of native vegetation throughout the country are degenerating through neglect, waterways are becoming silted up and loaded with farm waste, pests and weeds are continuing to spread, hills are eroding, and populations of

native species are becoming increasingly fragmented and threatened. In fact, north eastern hills leading environmental problems mainly centre on agriculture. As per our visit to different part of north eastern hills since last eight year we came to know that there are three main issues that need to be addressed:

1. Soil degradation
2. Water contamination
3. Biodiversity loss

In short, soil, water and biodiversity resources across eastern himalaya are continuing to deteriorate. The most worrying feature of this is that the deterioration is a slow, insidious process that is not readily noticeable on a day-to-day basis. It is not dramatic enough to galvanize public attention and action. But the deterioration is continuing, nevertheless, and

will mean that, before we know it, we will lose many of the features of our landscape that were important to us and to our native flora and fauna.

1. Soil degradation

Soils form very slowly, yet in many areas, we are eroding them very fast. For the most part, we know how to prevent this. For example, million hectares of erosion-prone hilly soil, space planting of poplars or other trees on farmland is needed, and good information is available on appropriate planting densities for different soil types. Yet overall,

less than a third of the erodible slopes on the hill country are adequately protected against predictable, high intensity rainfall events in most part of hill particularly Meghalaya and Darjeeling hills. Incentive schemes operated by regional councils are in most cases far too small: at the present rate of progress, it will take hundreds of years to achieve their objectives. Other soil degradation problems affecting particular areas include acidification; compaction; loss of organic matter; and the loss of natural soil organisms such as earthworms that is associated with excessive use of some chemicals. Reversing the current soil degradation, and restoring soil health, is fundamental to Eastern Himalaya hill future. Logging on steep mountain slopes leads to accelerated levels of erosion. A steadily growing population and introduction to the global market are spearheading the increased rate of deforestation in the Himalaya and this leads to soil erosion problems.

2. Water contamination

Mountains are the water towers for the plains below them. The great rivers rise in the mountains.



The quality of water flowing from the land is an important indicator of sustainable land management. In recent years, seven state of north eastern hill has made some progress in reducing point sources of pollution, such as those from dairy sheds and animal processing plants. Unfortunately, most

streams and rivers in agricultural areas remain badly degraded. This is because little has been done so far to prevent stock access to streams, and to curb run-off of contaminated water from paddocks. Example in case of Darjeeling hills, few of the wine factories are situated near the bank of teesta and ronget, that will severely hampered the micro climate of the adjoining area, which leads to poor fish breeding and

less phytoplankton availability (because of polluted water from factory). Again, we know what to do: we must fence off streams and drains, plant up stream sides with suitable vegetation to protect surface waters (this is called 'riparian management'), and limit stock numbers on water-logged pastures in winter

In many areas, where soils have high by-pass flow to groundwater, and/or where there are sensitive lakes and estuaries downstream, additional restrictions on land use will be needed if we are to avoid the pollution problems which plague to hill state and ultimately to whole India. Few of the resource management work come into force, regional level have achieved little. Their water plans, where they exist, generally fail to tackle these problems. Where landcare efforts and incentive schemes exist, they are far too small-scale. At the current rate of progress, the goal of restoring hills waterways to a fishable and swimmable standard remains hundreds of years away. It's high time for a sense of urgency on these issues.

3. Biodiversity loss

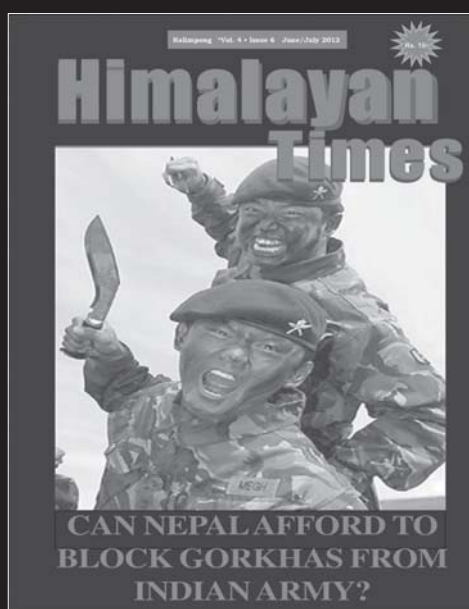
The Eastern Himalaya of India, revealing a great deal of diversity in flora and fauna, constitutes one of the richest

regions on earth. Biogeographically, the himalayan mountain range straddles a transition zone between the Palearctic and Indo-Malayan realms. Species from both realms are represented in the hotspot. High rainfall along with humid cold climate and other influencing factors such as altitude manifest tremendous differentiation of ecosystems and provide. This part of India is home to about 10 per cent of the global population. Functionally, hills play a critical role in the environment and economic process of the planet. A large number of orchid genera have been recognized with commercial value (e.g., *Dendrobium*, *Paphiopedium*, *Vanda*, *Phaius*, *Celogyne*, *cattleya*, *Cymbidium*, etc.) in Darjeeling himalaya. There is widespread landowner and community support for saving these valuable habitats of native plants and animals, yet decline is still the dominant trend. The primary biodiversity in extensive areas of the Northeast India has been disturbed and modified both through natural and anthropogenic causes. However, the first one has contributed only marginally to the change in vegetation type; human induced activities have led to irreversible transformation in the landscapes and resulted in colossal loss of biodiversity in the entire region. The region has witnessed excessive logging since the colonial days for revenue generation. Northeast India is often quoted that it continues to be a forest surplus region. However, the forest cover is rapidly disappearing from the entire region. Agriculture has been the main source of livelihood amongst the tribes and along with the settled agriculture (e.g., paddy cultivation), jhum (shifting cultivation) is often carried out

by many tribal groups. Jhumming is one of the most ancient systems of farming, believed to have originated in the Neolithic period, around 7000 BC. It is intricately linked with the ethos of the social and cultural values of the tribal communities. Jhumming has the adverse effects on ecology and conservation – including, destruction of soil fertility, soil erosion in upper catchments resulting in sedimentation of water bodies, poor yield of crops, destruction of wildlife and natural habitat, and floods. Forest fires are common and frequent in most part of eastern Himalaya, fires at the end of winters are a rule rather than exception. The villagers set fire to forest floor, which is littered with inflammable dry leaves and twigs. Regeneration (natural as well as artificial), is affected and wildlife is impacted negatively. The hill forests also get burnt due to jhum fires going out of control and spreading to the surrounding areas, this ultimately reduce the biodiversity pool of the region.

Conclusion

Our observation revealed that north eastern region is endowed with rich natural resources of soil, water and vegetation. Due to burgeoning population sustainable good environment is great concern. Management of natural resources of the region needs scientific interventions in the form of judicious use of industry by products and reduce deforestation, for healthy environment. ■



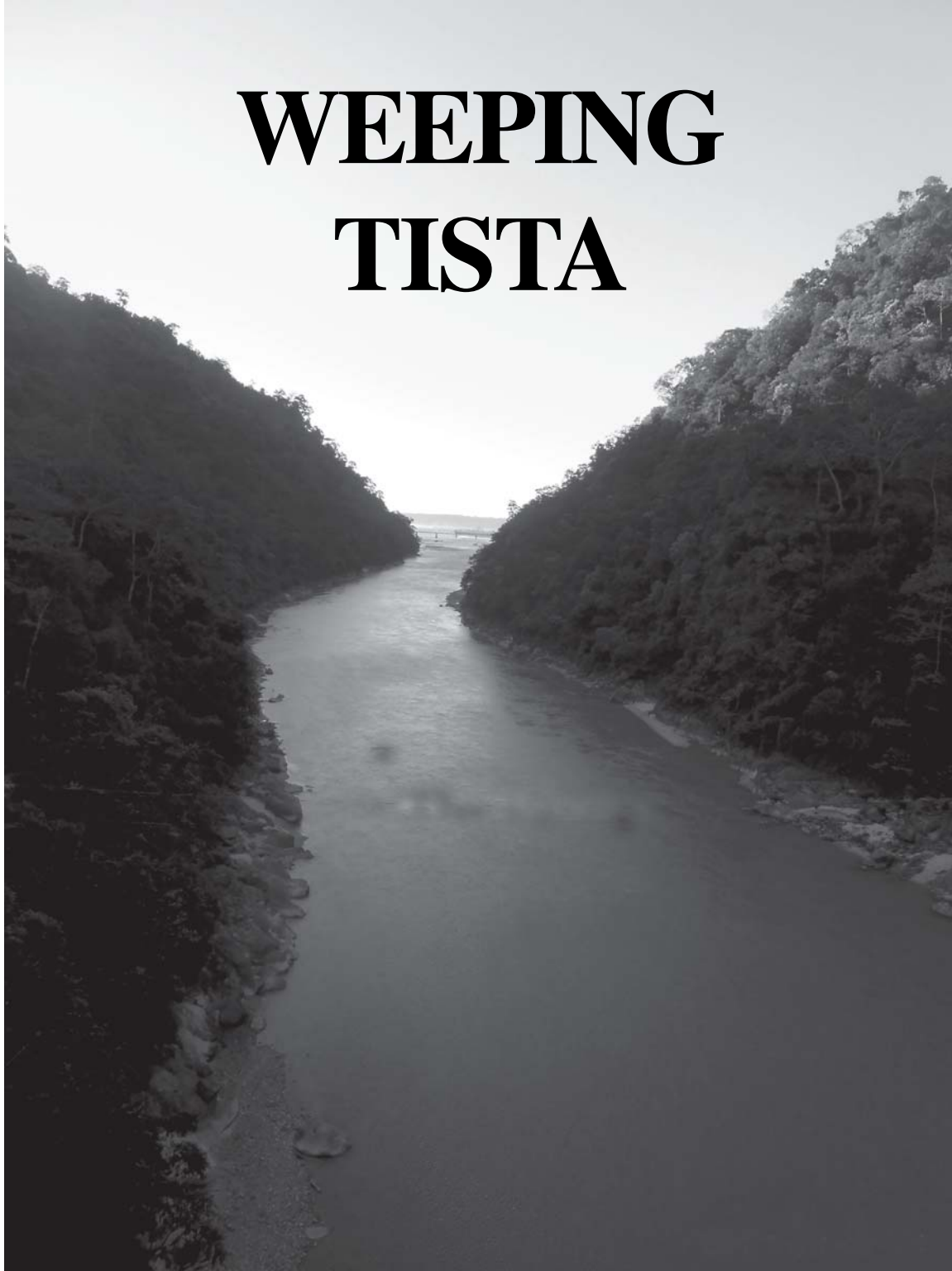
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WEEPING TISTA



The Tista or Teesta River often regarded, as lifeline of Darjeeling - Sikkim Himalaya is one of the major rivers flowing the Eastern Himalayan landscape. It is the fourth major river after the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna in the Eastern South Asian region. Tista originates in the Sikkim Himalaya as *ChhomboChhu* from a glacial lake *KhangchungChho* at an elevation of 5,280 meters in the northeastern corner of the state. The lake lies at the snout of the Tista Khangse glacier descending from Pauhunri peak (7,056 m) in northwestern direction. However, many scholars consider Tista Khangse glacier and *ChhoLhamo* as the source of Tista. It flows the entire length of Sikkim and carves out some of the profuse and verdant Himalayan temperate and tropical river valleys. As it flows down, the river forms the border between Sikkim and West Bengal.

Tista flows about 172 km in the hilly region of Sikkim and Darjeeling (India); the river runs for about 98 km in the plains of West Bengal (India) and another 134 km in Bangladesh before joining the great Brahmaputra in Bangladesh. The river drains a total geographical area of about 12,159 km². Around 2,004 km² of the basin (or about 17 percent) lies in Bangladesh with the rest of the basin area being in India.

As it traverses from its source to the plains, Tista receives water from a large number of tributaries on either side of its course forming a complex and dynamic river basin and therefore a unique eco-region fittingly referred to as 'Tista Eco-region'. The tributaries joining from the eastern flank are shorter in course but larger in number and have lesser volume of discharge whereas the tributaries on the western flank are fewer in number but much longer with larger drainage areas, thus contributing more amount of discharge to the main Tista River. This is so because right-bank tributaries drain heavily glaciated areas with sources in large snowfields. The left-bank tributaries, on the other hand, originate from semi-permanent and much smaller snow-fields as compared to right bank tributaries.

Tista River Basin has been home to several social groups in Sikkim, northern West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh since historic past. Starting from the Lepcha Tribe, Ethnic Bhutias and the Ethnic Nepalis in Sikkim-Darjeeling Himalaya to the agrarian communities of North Bengal and Bangladesh, Tista Basin is the source of livelihood for several socio-cultural groups. Further, Tista has been the source of etho-cultural and ethno-religious basis of many social groups in Darjeeling-Sikkim region. Tista River is a major and only source of water to agricultural crops of the thirsty Northern Bengal and North Western Bangladesh.

However, the historic symbiotic and intimate human-environment relationship between people and natural resource bases including water in the Tista Basin has been increasingly put to danger by diverse undercurrents of development in recent times. This has resulted in the imbalances in the environment and various ecological systems there in. This is a very serious issue both to our coming generations and us. It is important to understand that all the parameters of the environment are intimately interrelated and a change in one will negatively affect the other.


Besides other forms of development including expansion of agriculture and irrigation, construction of roads and buildings, urbanization etc, the Central and Provincial Governments of India are forcefully underway with series of hydropower dams within the Teesta River Basin (TRB). Consequently, the Sikkim-Darjeeling catchment of the Tista Basin is expected to produce over 6000 MW of electricity within the next few decades.

Ironically, the first Human Development Report (HDR) of Sikkim (2001) authored by Mahendra P Lama, then Economic Advisor to the Chief Minister of Sikkim, strongly advises Sikkim to harness rich water resource of the Sikkim Himalaya. The report further recommends state government to take help of private sector towards this end (page 77-84). The State Development Report of Sikkim (2008), takes similar stand as taken by HDR, 2001 (page 109-119). Both the reports cite the success of Chukha Project of Bhutan as an example for the development of hydro resource of Sikkim.

There are concerns that building of Hydro-dams may lead to river-induced seismicity in this geologically young and tectonically active region besides several other environmental, socio-cultural and socio-economic fallouts because of their little scientific basis.

Further, there have been serious issues on table with regard to sharing of Tista water between India and Bangladesh. Besides several existing and proposed hydro-dams in the Sikkim-Darjeeling Catchment, the Government of West Bengal has diverted almost entire Tista Water via artificial canal at Tista (Gajoldoba) Barrage in Jalpaiguri to irrigate its thirsty North Bengal leaving little or no water for Bangladesh. As a lower riparian country of the basin, Bangladesh has been regularly voicing its concern for the equitable sharing of the Tista River. But it is still to be achieved despite several meetings between Bangladesh and Indian governments.

Experts often project that the next 10-15 years shall witness depressing intra and inter-State water disputes if policy makers both in India and Bangladesh do not come up with sustainable solutions for the sustainable management and sharing of Tista Water. There is an urgent need to re-look our neighbourhood policy!

It is sad news for us that the *National Geographic* has listed Tista River among the eight mighty global rivers that run dry from human overuse. 

200 YEARS OF THE GORKHA REGIMENT





Abhishek Saksena

12 Facts About The Gorkha Regiment That Completes 200 Years In The Indian Army

They are one of the most feared soldiers in the world and have won the respects of even their enemies. The Gorkhas were integrated with the Indian Forces on April 24, 1815. Over time they have served in all theatres of war and won many military decorations. Here are some facts about the most respected regiment of the Indian Army.

1. So impressed were the British by the fighting skills and valour of the Gorkha soldiers in the Anglo Nepal War of 1814-16, that they were quick to integrate them in the British Indian Army.
2. They weren't raised as the Gorkha Regiment however. Instead it was called the Nasiri Regiment. The regiment was later renamed 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles\
3. After India's Independence, six regiments, the 1 GR, 3 GR, 4 GR, 5 GR, 8 GR and 9 GR were retained in the Indian Army, while 2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th joined the Brigade of Gurkhas in the British Army.
4. Another regiment was raised by the Indian Army, the 11 GR, to accommodate the soldiers who refused to be transferred to the British Army.
5. The Gorkha units are some of the most decorated in the Army. They have played an important role in all the wars and have won Battle Honours in Uri sector in 1947-48, Ladakh in 1962, Jammu and Kashmir in 1965 and 1971. They were also a part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka.
6. The Gorkha Regiments have been awarded 3 Param Vir Chakras, 33 Maha Vir Chakras, and 84 Vir Chakras during operations.
7. The Regimental Insignia of all the Gorkha Rifles Regiments consists of a pair of crossed khukris. The khukri is a curved Nepalese knife which all Gorkha Rifles soldiers carry as a personal weapon.
8. The Gorkha Regiment also has a tradition of sacrificing a male buffalo on the festival of Dusshera. The head of the buffalo has to be severed in one clean sweep of the khukri. Usually the youngest member of the unit gets the privilege
9. Field Marshal Manekshaw, who's parent unit was 12th Frontier Force Regiment that moved to the Pakistani Army, became a part of the 8 GR. He would later become the Colonel of the regiment of the unit. He once famously said "If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or is a Gorkha."
10. The war cry of the Gorkha Regiments is 'Jai Maha Kali, Ayo Gorkhali' which translates to Hail Goddess Kali, The Gorkhas Are Here.
11. Officers in the Gorkha Regiments of the Indian Army have to learn the Gorkhali language to be able to interact with their men in their native tongue.
12. The current Chief of Army Staff, General Dalbir Singh Suhag is also from the Gorkha Rifles. He was commissioned in 4/5 GR in 1974. And according to the 5 GR tradition, he wears his head gear with the strap below the lower lip. Other GR units wear the chin strap below the jaw.

KALIMPONG ANJUMAN ISLAMIA



Kalimpong is the largest of the four sub-divisions of the District of within the State of West Bengal. The Kalimpong region was once a part of the Kingdom of Bhutan. In 1865, after losing out to an armed British intervention, Bhutan ceded the territory of Kalimpong to British India. The British missionaries came in during the late 1800's & left a legacy of good schools, high educational standards, charitable Institutions & architectural styles reminiscent of the English countryside. People from mainland India came in to settle in Kalimpong & brought with them their skills in entrepreneurship & trade. Over the years Kalimpong slowly developed into a trading center from which all trade to & from Tibet passed. This continued till the mid sixties when Tibet ceased to exist as an independent nation & the mule trains wound up.

Since India is a country of multiple faiths, the people from mainland India, who settled in Kalimpong, included people of all faiths. Among the Muslims who migrated to Kalimpong, there were some who invited the people of other faith towards Islam. As a result of which most of them came into the fold of Islam. The reverted women married the men from the plains and started settling themselves in the town of Kalimpong.

In 1887, an organization was formed by the name of Anjuman Islamia. And the present mosque was a structure made of bamboos. But in the year 1923, after the Anjuman Islamia acquired 92x65 foot land by the British government, a concrete structure was built. Also, in the meanwhile, a 63x40 foot land at Malli road was allotted to the Anjuman Islamia for establishing a primary school and a guest house. Thus, the Anjuman Islamia School came into being which was successfully running until India gained her Independence. But after India gained her Independence in the year 1947, the complex of the school was divided into several smaller blocks. This was done so as to incur monetary help by giving these rooms on rent.

For about 300 years ago, the Kashmiri Muslims have settled themselves in the Tibetan city of Lhasa. These Muslims from Lhasa often used to visit Kalimpong for business purpose or for undertaking their pilgrimage to Mecca. All the arrangements for the Hajis (pilgrims) or the traders were met by the Anjuman itself.

The total Muslim population (including the Nepalese and Tibetans who had newly accepted Islam) was a bit above 400 in 1940. But after the 2nd World War, most of the Tibetan Muslim traders actually established themselves in Kalimpong. And when the office of the Muslim League was set in West Bengal, various high-profile Muslim leaders made their winter residence in Durpindara.

This increment in the Muslim population craved the need for an Alim (or an Islamic scholar) and an Urdu medium school. As such, in the year 1953, an Imam was appointed for the mosque who could lead the congregational prayer and be of help to the Muslims there. And within one year of its establishment, the school gained recognition by the Government. And the school is still running successfully even today.

In the meantime, in the year 1958, when Tibetans feared of themselves being conquered by the Chinese troops, several Muslim families collectively established a school, especially for the Tibetan Muslim children. This school imparted Islamic knowledge, along with secular studies of English and Hindi. This school was maintained by the Anjuman Islamia, Kalimpong and three lady teachers were given in charge of this. In 1960, 124 Muslim families from Tibet settled themselves in



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Kalimpong and the daughters of these families were enrolled in this school. However, the school was successfully running until 1968, after which, due to several reasons the school had to be shut down. When the Indian Government provided an accommodation for the Tibetan Muslims in Kashmir, around 80 families migrated there. And thus the establishment came to an end.

Keeping in mind the growing Muslim population in Kalimpong, the Masjid was decided to be enlarged and the foundation stone was laid on 18th June 1954. And in 1955, a well structured Masjid, with contemporary dome, was built. The Children's Park located on the southern part of the Masjid later got transformed into Jubilee School. Due to some reasons the school was closed and part of the field (25x60 ft) was given to the Masjid authorities in 1977. And it was later in 1995 that a three storied extension of the Masjid was built. The present Muslim population of Kalimpong is somewhere between 3000-3500, and even today when the Eid prayers are held, the Masjid area proves to be comparatively small.

Since Kalimpong is a multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious town, even the Muslim community has different strands- Nepali, Bengali, Tibetan, and several others who have settled from different regions of the country. The lifestyle, eating habits, language differ from one another, yet all are Muslims and stand united on an outer front. And, often, the Anjuman renders help in their social and religious life.

Even in the field of education the Muslims of Kalimpong do not lag behind. Amongst them are many Government employees who hold high post. These Muslims also play a greater part in the Nepali literature. Many Islamic books and journals have been translated in

the Nepali language by those literary figures who have been awarded the "Tribhuwan and Madan" award. Several Islamic books have also been edited by great Nepali writers. All such publications have undoubtedly contributed a lot to the Nepali literature.

Apart from this, the Muslim and the non-Muslim community share a perfect harmony between them and live united as one member of the society. Every person, whether he is a Muslim or a non-Muslim, is helped by one another as required. 🏠



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THE DESIGN WORRIORS

BY SANDIP C. JAIN

Bigger than any problem in the Hills of Darjeeling in the present times is the problem of Brain Drain- the best of talent, intelligence and enterprise drifts out of the Hills for greener pastures in the main land of India and abroad.

Just when the situation seemed to be in a point of no return, a ray of hope seems to be shimmering at the end of this otherwise dark and endless tunnel with a handful of youths, full of talent and ideas, choosing to stay back and making a career in their native place and contributing to its economy, rather than letting their talents be used by others.

Two such appreciable youths are Tej Thapa and Vikrama Rumba from Kalimpong. Tej, an alumni of St, Augustine's School completed his Computer Engineering from Vellore and later worked in Bangalore in the field he was train for. Vikrama, studied in Rockvale Academy and later completed his Interior Designing diploma from a reputed institute. Despite securing good placements in the fields they had trained and studied so hard for, both craved to come back to their roots and serve its society. A certain emptiness born out of guilt kept nibbling their conscience- Their yearning to give back to the Hills ultimately proved stronger that a seemingly successful career in the mainland of India. Both ultimately decided to quit their respective jobs and return back to the Hills.

Back in Kalimpong, after much thought, they decided to start a clothing company which would design and provide quality apparel to the younger generation of this fashion loving Hills. They named their company," **The Kingsmen**", and very soon **Kingsmen** caught the imaginations of the trendy youths of the region. The fashionable designs and quality materials they have been providing has now made the name **Kingsmen** synonymous with quality and fashion.

Having started this enterprise with a very small initial order from St, Augustine's School, today they deal with most schools in Kalimpong and also have executed orders in Darjeeling, Mirik, Kurseong and Gangtok.

Despite the high quality they provide, the eye catching designs they conjure up and their competitive pricing, they still face stiff competition from the low quality and shoddily designed products from Ludhiana and Kolkata due to their deeply embedded roots in the Apparel Industry. "But things are changing" says Tej. "After the initial skepticism and hesitation, now the schools and our other customers have started to respond to us more positively and have started to support us more" he adds.

And support Tej, Vikrama and others of their ilk certainly do need- not just for their individual efforts but more so for the future of the Hills.. 🏡



Poems



Anuja Pradhan

DRAGONS IN THE PEDONG SKY....

Wake up people, wake up...
Was the agonizing cry..
As flames leapt high like
Dragons in the dark sky...

Homes and businesses
Were set ablaze
As lives and dreams
Ended in an infinite maze...

As the present and future
Turned to ashes
Tears and sorrow
Was all that was left with the masses...

Then came the false promises
The lips services
And the false caresses
All of which were mere ruses...

Tears still flow
Dreams still shattered
Futures still bleak
The present in tatters..

Pedong still cries
At the thought of the inferno
Hoping that
Its tears would be seeds
For a better tomorrow.....

GHOST STORIES OF KURSEONG

Out of the many places believed to be haunted in Kurseong, the number one spot is definitely of Victoria Boys High School, located on Dow Hill. Surprisingly, this beautiful school is over 100 years old which would probably make it one of the oldest still functional schools in the country. Its foundation was laid by British in the year 1879. There are several stories about this school but all the incidents occur during the holiday season when the entire school is shut-down. People talk about how they still hear boys running and laughing in the corridors of the empty building. Some people mention seeing a boy standing at one of the windows, staring at them from the inside while the school was closed for holidays and there could not have been anyone inside. The most sinister story however is of a headless boy who haunts this school and many people claim to have seen it either on the premises or around the building of the school. School administration however of course denies all these rumors. There has never been a recorded death on the premises, either accidental or natural. None of the teachers or students has ever seen a ghost in the building, the students however though love to talk about it but teenagers getting fascinated by ghost stories would hardly surprise anyone.



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busy town in itself that is filled with children while the two great once British schools Dow Hill Girls and Victoria Boys school are open. There is nothing sinister about this place at all. It is just a quiet hill station standing still in time. There have certainly been deaths here but people die everywhere. It's not like that the people here are immortals. Every city, every town, every village in the world has cases of murders

and suicides. So what makes the deaths in Kurseong a work of ghosts? Why can it not be that people killed each other or themselves out of their own problems?

One common thing about all the "believed to be haunted" places is that locals love to talk about their ghosts, as if they are talking about their pet dog. I once read a theory somewhere that once these tales are told too often, even the lies that we ourselves told takes shape of a truth in our own hearts. Children here grow up listening to these stories and even though they never see anything supernatural themselves; by the time they reach their adulthood they hold a firm belief that the place they live in is indeed haunted. Some people talk about ghosts just for fun while others talk because they know it will promote tourism to the place. More than half of the tourists in Kurseong ask around about the locals and where can they hope to see a ghost,

as if they are in a zoo and want to see the tiger. These are the people who would go back and tell other how they indeed see a ghost or something supernatural when the truth actually is that they saw nothing.

Ghost or no ghost, the truth is that Kurseong is a peaceful town that has been made to look sinister by the locals themselves. There is a beautiful 150 year old school which is being portrayed as a haunted building rather than a monument of British era. Beautiful dense forests are being talked about as murder and suicide spots. I agree that it is indeed promoting the tourism here but is all that really needed? Darjeeling is anyways over-crowded, more of a residential city than a tourist destination and people often go looking for more secluded spots where they can spend some time in peace. That gives ample opportunity to Kurseong to receive its own share of tourists. So why all the ghost stories?

One thing that everyone overlooks is that this place is crowded with children, not only the ones that belong here but of other towns too, coming to attend school. These children walk down the same roads, spend their time in the same building but have never been bothered, hurt or killed by any ghost ever. How is that possible if indeed this place is so haunted? Do kids not always become the easy prey for evil spirits to possess or hurt in all the ghost stories? ■

Another believed to be haunted spot in Kurseong is Dow Hill and the forest surrounding it. Our headless ghost seems to be present here as well however at Dow Hill he does more than just making an appearance. As per the locals, while walking alone on the roads at Dow Hill, several people found themselves being followed by the headless zombie. Later on this ghost would just disappear in the forest but would forever haunt the memories of the person who saw it. People talk about how anyone who ever saw this ghost would always have the feeling of being followed by someone or a pair of eyes looking at them at all times. This feeling would torment and depress the person so much that it would eventually lead to a suicide. Some of the other tales about the Dow Hill forest are the usual tales of people hearing voices, sightings of a woman in white, red eyes staring out of the dark and many more of ghost tales that you would usually hear about several other places. Another thing that Dow Hill is notorious for are the murders and suicides that have taken place here, of which the administration offices have no record.

I cannot say that why anyone would believe that Kurseong needed a ghost to be known. This place has already made its mark in the history and is stunningly scenic. The ascent from Rangtang to Kurseong comprises of beautiful landscapes, wooded mountains, tea gardens, tea factories and forests. Furthermore, it is quite a




Dr. Sonam B. Wangyel

ITS NEVER TOO LATE

Yes, it's never too late to write an old story that has hardly been told. Like all hill stations in India Darjeeling is also renowned for excellent schooling facilities. The elegant 'English medium schools' with their rich future-secured children have their own niche in the long story of Darjeeling but so do also the less affluent schools catering to the less privileged native students. Schools like SUMI (Kalimpong), St. Alphonsus' (Kurseong), St. Robert's (Darjeeling), Nepali Girls' High School (Darjeeling and Kalimpong) and numerous similar schools have produced alumni that many of the financially better endowed institutes would envy.

However, in the early stages many of these schools suffered numerous teething problems but the pioneers that ventured into the mountains to establish these institutions were invariably men made of sterner stuff and they prevailed. The first officially recognized school for the natives, Bhutia Boarding School, commenced in 1874 followed by the Government Middle English School in 1860. The two were amalgamated to form the High English School, later named Government High School. The Bhutia Boarding School, meant for the Bhutias and Lepchas, had a difficult commencement not for the lack of funding or enthusiasm but for sheer lack of students. Some of the Kazis (landed aristocrats of high rank) of Sikkim were persuaded to send their children but still the school was short on enrollment. The situation being such the authorities had to literary hunt for students. Finally, even adults were admitted to the primary section and one can picture a primary section with an assortment of children liberally interspersed with adults. These primary section adults, mustache and beard adorned, were naturally a difficult lot to control. Truancy amongst these men was very common and it has been recorded that it was "impossible to prevent the Lepcha boys from running away." When confronted by the masters these adult primary section students had a useful excuse against which the masters could do or say little: they claimed that they had gone to meet their wives!

I can still recall the late Mr. Tenzing Wangdi, former Minister of State in West Bengal, talking about his school days in the same school in the 1920s. The Bhutia boys who took Tibetan as a vernacular subject were always severely marked by their Tibetan master. This very much affected their rankings in the class because the Hindi and Nepali language teachers were more generous. One day, the boys mustered enough courage to tell him that they were suffering poor positions in the class because the master was too much of a perfectionist. The Tibetan master became disheartened to know that he was responsible for making his pupils not achieve the positions they deserved. It was not just present pupils but those whom he had taught in the earlier years, had suffered his measly marks. The Tibetan master decided to make amends. His repentant action saw the boys in the next examination receiving much better marks and he was so keen redress his mistake that he over did it with several boys scoring 110%... 



Zang-dog Palrifo Brang or the Durpin monastery as it is commonly called was completed in the year 1975. H.H. the Dalai Lama, on his visit to Kalimpong in the year 1956 presented a set of rare manuscripts “Kangyur” of 108 volumes to the Durpin Dara Monastery. The Dalai Lama visited Kalimpong once again on May 29, 1976, for a four day visit, when he consecrated at the Durpin Dara Monastery. The above picture was taken during the time the monastery was being constructed.

